
“PLUS ONE”

STRATEGIES FOR
ACCESSIBILITY

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“Plus one” thinking is a method coined by Thomas J. Tobin, professional consultant, author, and international speaker in the field of Universal Design in higher education. The “plus one” model is used to help educators find ways to make their curriculum and classroom environment more accessible by tackling one barrier at a time. The idea is to change just one thing about your syllabus, classroom structure, assignments, or exams to make them accessible.



This guide provides real-life examples of accessibility strategies our faculty are successfully implementing in their classrooms. Hopefully you’ll find some ideas that will work for you! Questions about any of these strategies (or ones not found in this guide) can be addressed to disabilityandaccess@ursinus.edu.

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A HUGE "thank you" to all those who contributed to this guide! If you would like to add your own strategy, please fill out this form. We will update this resource periodically.

DURING LECTURE



What is one accessibility strategy you implemented in your classroom recently?

I used Present Live so students could follow along with my PowerPoint in real time on their own devices and turn on captioning. They can also return to a previous slide if they missed something.

Why did you implement this strategy?

I noticed that depending on the seating in the room, some students had a poorer view of the board than others. I've posted PowerPoints to Canvas also, but I found that more students followed along when they could watch the presentation live on their own device.

How did you implement the strategy?

PowerPoint has a feature called Present Live that anyone can use as long as they save the PowerPoint to OneDrive and open/project the presentation from online. Instructions can be found [here](#).

What did you notice after implementing this strategy?

Not all students felt the need to connect to the Present Live, but a handful did and I noticed when walking around, they did have the presentation up on their screen and were taking notes in their notebooks. I believe it helped them concentrate and see better. I use it now in virtually every class I teach.

Christine Iannicelli

What is one accessibility strategy you implemented in your classroom recently?

Volunteer note takers for the class

Why did you implement this strategy?

Students had accommodations that asked me to provide them with my notes for the class. However, my notes are often things like "Discuss standard error here", which isn't really helpful for students. Instead, students are asked to volunteer to take notes and post them for the class after each lecture. Students receive credit for sharing their notes as well, so that the work doesn't go unnoticed.

How did you implement the strategy?

It is done through the discussion board on Canvas. No particular software. It is discussed as an option at the start of the course, so that the students know it is there and something they are encouraged to do.



What did you notice after implementing this strategy?

Some classes really love it, and people regularly volunteer to take notes. However, other classes don't engage with it at all, which reduces its utility in helping to create a classroom environment in which a particular accommodation isn't necessary. When the class participates in it, the note taking is well received, helping not only those students who require an accommodation, but also those who need to miss class for some reason. It also gives students a way to demonstrate participation and engagement in the learning process without having to speak up in class.

TESTS & QUIZZES



What is one accessibility strategy you implemented in your classroom recently?

My tests are usually double the class time for everyone (they're online). Everyone finishes.

Why did you implement this strategy?

To combat test anxiety and to accommodate students who had accommodations but who did not ask for them. To take into account student mental health/health issues and life struggles.

How did you implement the strategy?

The test times were just adjusted in Canvas.

What did you notice after implementing this strategy?

I'm not sure whether it made a difference in student performance--perhaps--but it seemed to allay anxieties.

What is one accessibility strategy you implemented in your classroom recently?

Untimed quizzes graded based on on-time completion.

Why did you implement this strategy?

The goal of quizzes in my courses are for students to review class material before the exam (to help prevent cramming). Therefore, it was important to me that all students be able to complete them. As the main goal was to review material, I opted to give full credit if they were complete on time instead of based on accuracy.

Students get feedback on inaccurate answers to help them study for the exams.

How did you implement the strategy?

I am using Canvas practice quizzes which are ungraded, then I have a separate Canvas grading category where I enter points if they complete the practice quiz.

What did you notice after implementing this strategy?

A couple of students claimed they had difficulty finding the quizzes on Canvas. I've tried to fix this by putting the quiz as a graded assignment that links to the practice quiz. I continue to announce the quiz due dates in class ahead of time.

Jennifer Frymiare

ASSIGNMENTS & GRADING



What is one accessibility strategy you implemented in your classroom recently?

Flexible deadlines with some structure & student autonomy built in.

Why did you implement this strategy?

In writing heavy courses, I notice a lot of anxiety in students as papers approach, which often leads to them freezing up, looking for shortcuts like ChatGPT, etc. Since the writing/process is the point, I wanted to reduce some of these barriers.

How did you implement the strategy?

How it works: Students reach out to the instructor to request an extension (no penalty, no limits to how many assignments they can do this for) and the students state when they feel they will be ready to submit the assignment. This part is key, because they are taking responsibility by choosing a deadline and committing to it. Guiding resources: written guidelines in the syllabus, on Canvas, and reminders in the class ppt slides when an essay deadline was approaching. Key conversation points when I go over the policy in class: "I'd rather have your essay two days late than have an essay you're not happy submitting"; "I want you to be responsible for setting something I'd do in the future would be to create a form for students to fill out that auto-generates a spreadsheet for me, which will make tracking easier (it also imitates the process one might go through in requesting time off from work, for example).



What did you notice after implementing this strategy?

I would say that around 40% of my students take advantage of this policy, and last semester all but one student successfully met the new deadline and submitted good quality work. I also found that most students only requested an extension of anywhere from 1-3 days, which did not inconvenience me at all in terms of workflow-- I wasn't grading 25 papers in three days, anyway.

What is one accessibility strategy you implemented in your classroom recently?

When I assign multiple small assignments (such as discussion posts or informal writing), I always include a certain percentage of "free drops" so that students can skip some and still receive full credit.

Why did you implement this strategy?

I didn't want students to feel like they had to make up an excuse for missing smaller assignments. Also, realistically, it's not very important that they complete every single small assignment, but only that they complete the majority of them. (That is, they can still follow the material if they've skipped one or two of these kinds of assignments--but not if they skip lots of them.) This also helps to navigate absences; if they're well enough to complete a small assignment, they can still have credit for it even if they don't attend class, but if they can't do the small assignment, they don't have to worry about making it up later. It makes things easier for everybody.

How did you implement the strategy?

I explain it on the syllabus and assignment sheet. I call them "free skips."



What did you notice after implementing this strategy?

Students seem to appreciate this, and it helps the smaller assignments feel more manageable. In my opinion, it creates an atmosphere in which we are mature and mutually respectful: we're all responsible for our work, but with the recognition that some weeks it's hard or near impossible to perform as well as others.

What is one accessibility strategy you implemented in your classroom recently?

Alternative assessment with clear but flexible due dates and opportunities for revising work. (I feel that this approach benefits students generally, but it enables me to better meet students with accessibility challenges where they are.)

Why did you implement this strategy?

I found my prior approach to assessment, which relied heavily on exams and quizzes, did not give me enough insight into student learning and also didn't allow for flexibility needed during the pandemic. I also decided that I was unwilling to enter into an "arms race" with students regarding academic dishonesty. I felt the need to design classes in which cheating makes no sense so that we can all focus on learning things.

How did you implement the strategy?

I don't grade assignments in my courses. Instead, they have "Complete/Needs Revision/Missing" statuses in Canvas, accompanied in many cases with substantive feedback. Students submit regular learning reflections and propose a final grade in ~week 13. I retain the final authority over grades, but in the vast majority of cases, we are within a +/- grade increment of each other. This approach keeps me in touch with students' goals and needs throughout the semester and gives me a much more insight into their learning than a spreadsheet. 

What did you notice after implementing this strategy?

Students have adjusted well, for the most part, once they try it out. Those who are used to shooting for a high score miss the scores at first, but positive feedback on assignments and the ability to check in with me on their progress seem to be reasonable replacements. The issue of structure is crucial, especially for students for whom executive functioning is a challenge—this is not an “anything goes” approach at all. I find that I need to provide, if anything, more structure in the form of due dates, clearly articulated expectations, and scaffolding.